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THE SCOPE OF POLITICAL SCIENCE.

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The question must sometimes occur to us who are interested in political science, whether it will ever supply general principles for the guidance of statecraft. At present there seems to be little if any connection between them. Technical skill and special knowledge in history, economics and jurisprudence are appreciated and employed by statesmen, but the idea of determining state policy upon scientific principles has no place in practical politics. In memoirs of Bismarck one finds much about politics as an art and nothing about politics as a science except in contemptuous references to people who approach politics in a doctrinaire spirit. His way of expressing a small opinion of Gladstone's statesmanship was to speak of him as "Professor" Gladstone.¹ This did not mean that Bismarck felt any contempt for professors as such—administration in Germany makes large use of the service of specialists—but that his conception of statecraft was altogether empirical and he distrusted political activities based upon abstract principles. This, I believe, is a frame of mind common among statesmen. Professor Sheldon Amos, in his "Science of Politics" remarks that "practical statesmen, immersed in actual business and oppressed by the ever-recurring presence of new emergencies, almost resent the notion of applying the comprehensive principles of science."²

Examination of manuals of political science might furnish practical statesmen with the retort that political science has no comprehensive principles to offer. Eminent authorities in political science restrict its scope, either by giving a technical meaning to the term "Political" or to the term "the State."

¹ *Bismarck: Some Secret Pages of His History*, Moritz Busch, Vol. II, p. 262.

² *The Science of Politics*, p. 66.

The process has resulted in a detachment of terms from their ordinary meaning. The Statesmen's Year Book for 1905, although it does not pretend to include all the states in the world, but only such as are important enough to figure in a manual for practical use, gives historical and statistical data in regard to over 250. It might be supposed that the province of political science is to explain the nature of these various states and to account for their characteristics, but one will look in vain for such information. On the contrary, one finds that comparatively few of the states mentioned in hand-books and gazetteers are admitted to be states at all, in formal treatises on political science. Professor Amos says: "The geographical area to which the science of politics extends at present is limited to the countries of Europe and North America and to those countries which are directly subjected to the influence and dominating control of Europe and the United States. Thus it is not saying too much to allege that for all practical purposes of practical politics and therefore of that science on which all sound practice must rest, the State is that integral unity which has been discovered by the accidents of European government."

Prof. Burgess, in his "Political Science and Constitutional Law," effects the same limitation by annexing a technical meaning to the word "Political." He restricts its application to one class of states which alone he recognizes as having attained political organization, and in this way substantially concurs with Prof. Amos, remarking that "only Europe and North America have succeeded in developing such political organizations as furnish the material for scientific treatment." Prof. Dunning in his "History of Political Theories" proposes to leave to sociology "the entire field of primitive institutions" and the context suggests that he means to include in the transfer all institutions of public authority except those of "the European Aryan peoples." He holds with Prof. Burgess that they are "the only peoples to whom the term 'political' may properly be applied."³ Definitions of the

³ Political Theories: Ancient and Mediæval, pp. XVII, XIX.

State may be found in works of political science which imply a broader scope than is indicated by these quotations;—Professor Burgess himself holds that the State is the permanent and universal condition of human nature;—but in the selection of subject matter the dominant tendency is to narrow the scope of political science to a particular phase of development which has resulted in special forms embodied in positive law. The treatment of these forms under the limitations imposed may result in immediate gains as regards clearness and precision. These excellences appear in the treatises I have mentioned. But when the field is thus narrowed, political science announces by its own definitions that it does not pretend to be co-extensive with all forms of public authority. The very states whose activities are the chief centers of disturbance in world politics are excluded. I refer to China, Russia and Turkey. Professor Burgess goes so far as to say: “The national, popular state alone furnishes the objective reality upon which political science can rest in the construction of a truly scientific political system. All other forms contain mysteries which the scientific mind must not approach too closely.”⁴

Even if we accept the national, popular state of Western civilization as the basis of political science what assurance is there of the possession of a true norm? The history of political theories frequently warns us that political forms are apt to be passing away by the time political science apprehends them. Prof. Dunning has pointed out that at the time Aristotle by analysis of the political phenomena of the Greek city-state had devised the scheme of classification to which political science still adheres, the city-state itself had run its course and dominion was about to pass to the Macedonian empire. Likewise, when Polybius framed his theory of balanced powers of government, as exemplified in the Roman commonwealth that type of government was decaying and when Cicero expounded the same theory as the proper model of polity, the shadow of the approaching empire was already projected across

⁴ *Political Science and Constitutional Law*, Vol. I, p. 58.

the ruins of the commonwealth. During the Middle Ages the imperial theory of government was never more fervently advocated by publicists than when imperial authority was moribund and the rise of nationality was the salient fact of the actual situation. Or, to come down to modern times, the received theory during the eighteenth century in England, was that of a balance between co-ordinate powers of government, although meanwhile the development of parliamentary institutions was taking place, the essential characteristic of which is the union of the executive and legislative functions in one organ of the national sovereignty. The theory of administration through co-ordinate powers of government still prevails in the United States although numerous phenomena demonstrate its inadequacy to any thinker who faces the facts.

When history thus advises that every succeeding form of political structure has seemed final to the people who lived under it, how can we be sure that the form which political science now takes as its objective reality is any exception to the rule? May not it too be transitory like the rest? Indeed, with such tremendous evidence of change all around us, can we doubt it? The instability of political forms is the most salient fact of modern history. Upon any broad survey of events the national, popular state itself is found to be in a condition of metamorphosis. Seignobos remarks of Europe that "every state has since 1814 changed either its political or social organization" and these changes have been accompanied by a series of wars and revolutions.⁵ That the series has not ended there are many portents to apprise us. One has only to read the newspapers of the day for evidence. The institutions of self-government we are proposing to introduce among other races are not only recent in their formation but we are not ourselves contented with them or able to work them to our satisfaction. Representative assemblies, usually regarded as the structural principle of the perfect type, exhibit signs of corruption and decay. Everywhere there are indications of processes of change in industrial organization with accompanying

⁵ Political History of Europe, Charles Seignobos, p. 834.

social and political transformations. Turbulent streams of influence are eroding old social strata, cutting out new channels and making new deposits, and whether these are mere flood ravages to be eventually cleared away, or whether new strata are being formed upon which future polity must rest, political science does not appear to be able to offer any opinion. The idea of permanence as regards the type, which persists in spite of such circumstances, is an illusion due to the ephemeral nature of human life. By giving a wider application to Mirabeau's remark, we may explain it by saying that events are great but men are small.

Such considerations lead us to conclude that not only does the scope of political science as usually defined leave it with but slight connection with practical politics, but that its foundations are not secure even in the restricted province which it has chosen for itself. This defective situation is a consequence of the subjective character of its method. Political science gathers its concepts from the mental deposits of our own race experience. Such terms as the state, government, sovereignty, citizenship, liberty, etc., are analyzed to determine their nature and to deduce therefrom the institutional principles of political organization. At one time the belief was entertained that principles so obtained were universal in their application and should guide enlightened statesmanship. The close of the eighteenth century was a period in Europe marked by a close alliance between political philosophy and statecraft, but the time came when the alliance was dissolved in mutual disgust and the word "ideology" was coined to discredit statecraft assuming to be founded upon scientific theory.

Since political science incurred that reproach a spirit of caution has characterized it which is probably to a great extent a reaction from the confident optimism that once marked its teachings. It still feels the shock of the French Revolution. Historical criticism has been so destructive of its former deductions that it is chary of offering new ones. Its present tendency is to avoid the statement of general principles and to limit the application of its abstract terms. Anthropological research has confirmed this tendency by exposing

the local and incidental character of the concepts shaped by civilization. We have come to realize that when we speak of the principles of political science what we really mean is general observations based upon the race-experience of a group of peoples whose culture rests upon Greco-Roman foundations. The present disposition of political science to confine itself to the civilized state as its proper subject is therefore really evidence of increase of knowledge. But at the same time it is evidence that as at present constituted, political science is incapable of being correlated with statesmanship as the source of the principles which guide and support the art of government. To occupy such a relation it must take for its subject-matter the nature of public authority whatever forms it may assume, elucidating their genetic order and formulating the laws of their growth and development. It must detach its abstract terms from the historical accidents of their origin and provide itself with a systematic terminology of definite significance. In fine, political science can not be held to be constituted as such until it is put upon an objective basis. It must experience the reconstruction which the general body of science has undergone at the hands of inductive philosophy, and take its place in orderly connection with natural history.

That politics have a natural history is implied by the accepted theory of the descent of man, but while the philosophical interest of the principle may be admitted it may be questioned whether it is practically possible to provide a scheme of classification for political science in accord with it. However great the difficulty may be, there seems to be no escape from it if political science is ever to be placed upon an objective basis, for the cardinal principle of that theory is that the development of humanity is but one phase of a process of development governed throughout by the same general laws, and hence it is impossible that we can understand any part of this process except in orderly relation to the whole process.

As to the possibility of defining the scope of political science in accord with this principle, it may be remarked that the idea has already been distinctly expressed. A theory which

regards the state not only as permanent and universal in the abstract but develops the idea with logical consistency in its historic application, was propounded in 1885 by Sir John Robert Seeley in lectures at Cambridge University. They were edited by Prof. Sidgwick and published in 1896 under the title "Introduction to Political Science." Pointing out that political science now concerns itself only with civilized states, excluding from consideration the wild and confused associations in which savages and barbarians may seem to live, Professor Seeley remarked: "An inductive system of political science must begin by putting aside as irrelevant the distinction of barbarous and civilized, and by admitting to an impartial consideration all political aggregates, all societies held together by the principle of government. We must distinguish and arrange the various kinds of the state in the same purely observant spirit which a Linnaeus brought to plants or a Cuvier to animals. We can no longer think of excluding any state because we do not like it, any more than a naturalist would have a right to exclude plants under the contemptuous name of weeds, or animals under the name of vermin." Referring to the fact that in the animal kingdom, the greater number among the large classifications are assigned to strange organisms in which the vital principle is developed in such a manner that the being has little external resemblance to what is popularly called an animal, Professor Seeley said that if political entities were studied by the same method, "It would not be surprising if all the states described by Aristotle, and all the states of Europe into the bargain, should yield but a small proportion of the whole number of varieties, while those states less familiar to us and which our manuals are apt to pass over in silence as barbarous, yielded a far larger number."

Political science so conceived would certainly be co-extensive with all forms of public authority and its general principles would be universal in their application. The construction of such a system of political science is difficult for reasons which have been well stated by Professor Sidgwick. He admitted that "political science aims like other sciences at as-

certaining relations of resemblance among the objects it studies; it seeks to arrange them in classes, or to exhibit them as examples of types," but in the present state of our knowledge a comprehensive survey of the field is not feasible. "If we try to begin at the beginning, as seems natural, we have to begin in almost utter darkness. If we are right to infer that our own political society descended by direct filiation from a group of the most politically undeveloped type . . . a long part of the process of development must have taken place in prehistoric times. When the light of history first falls upon the societies to which the modern European state can be distinctly traced, they have all a distinct and complex political organization. Any inquiry into the first origin of political society carries us beyond history proper into speculation, conjecture, inference from analogy."⁶

In every branch of biological science, inquiry into origins goes beyond history proper, and there are many points in which the sequence of development is obscure and conjectural, but that is not regarded as invalidating the method; and the proper scheme of classification is held to be one based upon genetic order, such as Professor Seeley proposed in political science. Upon examination it may be found that material available for use has already been accumulated in the general progress of science. Great light has been cast upon social origins in recent years and the results are of capital importance in removing difficulties now experienced both by political science and sociology in seeking valid definitions. The present state of our knowledge, it seems to me, should cause us to discard the traditional idea that the civilized state is the only true form of the state, other varieties possessing significance only as they can be classified in serial order antecedent to the formation of the civilized state. It is well known that in the East, populous states have been developed of high cultural attainment, which cannot possibly be ranged with the civilized state of the west in any serial order, but the difficulty is disposed of when we apply to the state the idea of variation of species, and

⁶ The Development of European Polity, Henry Sidgwick, pp. 3, 27, 28.

conceive of political development as proceeding on divergent lines, with successions of supremacy as regards particular types. If in the present state of our knowledge we can not adopt a comprehensive scheme of classification, we can at least recognize the fragmentary and provisional character of the present system. We can base our classifications upon genetic order so far as it is traceable, and it so happens that in studies of comparative politics whose interest is most immediate and of greatest practical value to us in this country, the genetic order is historically evident. The Australian commonwealth, the Dominion of Canada, and the United States of America, are branches from one stem of polity, and a study of their structural development and variation might elucidate problems of our own politics, particularly as regards municipal government. The states of Central and South America are as obviously branches from another stem of polity.

Doubtless it will take the labors of generations of scholars to bring political science to a position of authority as regards practical politics, but certainly no undertaking could be more important or more inspiring to effort, since success means attainment of the power to give rational determination to the destinies of nations. It is hardly too much to say that political science transcends all other branches of science in practical value for it deals with the conditions underlying them, all art and science having their seat within the bounds of polity.